

ANGELA MASSARO-FAIN



**“It takes a team to
make an ad agency”**

The gang at Grapevine Communications

L to R: Lisa Becht (Designer), Alice Fernandez (Client Relations Manager), Charles Westcott (Art Director), John Fain (Partner & Executive Vice President), Angela Massaro-Fain (Founder & President), Erik von Whipperman (Art Director), Heidi Cook (Production Manager), Gabriele Vest (Account Executive).
Missing: Rob Welling (Creative Director), Tammy Dumer (Bookkeeper).



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ANGELA MASSARO-FAIN

“We don't create ads, we create opportunity” proclaims a brochure for Grapevine

Communications, a Sarasota-based full-service advertising, marketing and public relations firm, whose president, Angela Massaro-Fain, practices what she preaches.

In the economic downturn, when many companies view advertising as an expendable rather than an investment, Angela met the challenge of a probable business slowdown head on. “Although not all clients cut spending immediately, we targeted 50 additional companies to talk to; got 41 appointments in seven months netting 28 new clients. With 80 clients active at any one time, our volume is up 25%, but we're working ten times harder.”

Working hard to create opportunity epitomizes Angela's career. While studying at the School of Visual Arts in New York City, Angela commuted from West Orange, New Jersey, where she served as art director for a turnkey agency, including an in-house printing plant. “I had to do a bit of everything so I learned all aspects of the business.”

Across-the-board experience served Angela well when she moved to Montreal with her first husband. “After six years of freelancing I started Grapevine in 1988, found an immediate client and added staff within three months. I targeted Blue Chip companies with headquarters in both New Jersey and Montreal. Initial small projects turned into major accounts. Intertape Polymer Group's introductory job billed \$500, yet they remained a client for 10 years during which the company went public and expanded into four countries.”

When Intertape's CEO decided to move its headquarters to Sarasota, where he had a vacation home, he bought Grapevine—everything except the name—for his in-house agency and hired Angela to run it. Again Angela found herself commuting between Sarasota and Montreal, where she was completing projects in order to close her business, as well as to rent and eventually sell the building she owned there.

By this time Angela was divorced from her second husband and the single mother of a two-and-one-half year-old daughter. “While at Intertape,” Angela explains, “I worked closely with the company's VP of marketing, John Fain. When my contract with the company was fulfilled by 2001, John encouraged me to restart Grapevine. By 2002, John had become my business partner and my husband.”

As a team Angela oversees creative while John handles strategic planning. “Initially I had no sales or strategic planning experience,” Angela admits. “I, along with all senior management employees, am expected to understand the business of each client as well as everything about our business.” She laughingly describes her latest lesson—learning to change the toner in their new printer.

The company has grown from two employees to a staff of ten whose efforts

have earned accolades such as 2006 “Young Business of the Year” by the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce; “Top 25 Advertising Agency of SW Florida” five years in a row by Tampa Bay Business Journal; and a “2009 Small Business of the Year” finalist by both the Sarasota and Manatee Chambers of Commerce.

Grapevine Communications also donates more than \$100,000 in pro bono services each year to local charities as “expressions of our compassion as well as our commitment to the community that we are here to stay. We aren't going anywhere.”

However, Angela's ultimate passion is family. “John is a great partner; he knows me better than anyone else. We have a division of labor at home—not my job or your job—just whatever it takes to get it done. We've vowed ‘til concrete boots do us part.’”

Daughter Maria-Francesca, now 13 and recently returned from an Out of Door Academy student exchange in London, is named after Angela's late mother, to whom Angela gives credit for her success. “She gave me my first sketch pad at age 12. I took extra art classes and decided to make a business out of it. All I've wanted is to make my mother proud of me.”

Other evidence of family is clearly visible throughout Grapevine's Lakewood Ranch headquarters where Maria-Francesca has her own office to house the paintings and sculptures she's created. Crayon drawings by grandchildren from John's previous marriage share walls with original artwork Angela and John have collected during their global travels. Even the family's Yorkshire terriers enjoy office space underneath Angela's desk.

The Grapevine staff is also considered family. “I care about and am loyal to our staff whose good attitudes make me proud.” Their input has contributed to the company's most recent cost-cutting measures, which included eliminating the office cleaning service. “We now have Dusting Parties where each person takes on a different ‘housekeeping’ chore. Everyone knows the work needs to be done, so why not make it fun?”

“Everyone also knows my management style is basically to shoot from the hip; there is no guessing with me. But most people don't know I was on the pageant circuit from ages 17 to 23. I love applause and have boxes of trophies, but I discovered that behind the smiles and strutting are many sad people. So, I decided to become the person I wanted to be instead.”

In the future, Angela envisions “being 80 years old and still holding John's hand; seeing my daughter become whatever she wants to be; and continuing to grow my business either organically or through acquisition.”

Her advice to other women: “Never be afraid; don't take no for an answer; know your value; and don't give up.”

Story by: Virginia Sirocky
 Images: Andrea Hillebrand

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